

UNC President Margaret Spellings' Report to the Board of Governors | September 2017

Good morning. It's back-to-school season, and in the past few weeks, we've welcomed more than 60,000 new students out of a total of 230,000 enrolled across the University system. That's 60,000 new people looking to us for an education, for new opportunities, for the chance to work hard and earn a better future, and contribute to and fuel the state's economy.

Our job is to help translate hopes into reality — to make sure students can afford to stay in school, that they can graduate on time, that they will leave our institutions with the skills and attributes they need to be successful in North Carolina and the world. The UNC Strategic Plan that you all adopted and that we've been working to implement over the past several months will have real, meaningful consequences for every one of those students, and for hundreds of thousands more across our state over the coming years.

Together, we've set big goals for our system, and we all know that progress on those goals will only be achieved through the hard work of our talented chancellors, faculty, and staff. In that spirit, General Administration staff have worked with each institution over the course of the spring and summer to identify institutional contributions to the system's strategic plan. This collaborative process has produced a series of Performance Agreements that reflect each institution's unique priorities and set high expectations. As is so often the case, I've been inspired by the willingness of our leaders to step up and commit to serving the needs of our growing state. There are just a few last I's to dot and T's to cross, but we will officially ink those agreements before the month is out.

I mention all of that because sometimes it's easy to lose sight of those fundamental responsibilities to the students and citizens of North Carolina. These are challenging times for higher education, and for public institutions more generally. We've become the focal point of political and cultural controversies; the preferred venue for protests and counter-protests; and a convenient outlet for broader economic worries. That tends to generate a lot of interest, and it has helped fuel a sense of skepticism about the value of higher education.

But amid all of that, we remain the country's single best engine for economic mobility and individual opportunity. You see that, not only in the hope and confidence of those 230,000 students enrolled, but also in state policymakers who trusted us enough to assign a lot of important homework and gave us enhanced financial support. And we're wasting no time.

We've opened two Lab Schools this fall, with an additional seven slated to follow over the next two years. Creating deeper ties between school districts and universities will both strengthen our K-12 system and improve the quality of our teacher preparation program, and I'm proud of the way ECU and Western Carolina University have embraced this work. We look forward to sharing results and insights as these new schools get up and running.

At the same time, we're continuing the critical work of aligning our resources with our goals. The Funding Model Task Force, chaired by former BOG member Scott Lampe, is moving ahead with a review of the way we allocate resources across the system, aligning our core funding formula with the needs and priorities of a 21st-century enterprise.

Marty Kotis has assumed leadership of the facilities task force, which will take a hard look at how we manage our capital assets. We are, by far, the state's largest manager of buildings and capital infrastructure, and there are many ways we could be doing that more efficiently. I have every confidence that Marty and his fellow task force members will take a thorough approach and bring recommendations to the board.

We're also hosting a high-profile summit on student veterans in November, bringing together some of the strongest voices across the country to highlight the needs of our student veterans. As you all know, North Carolina has one of the largest veteran populations in the country, and we want to share lessons learned and focus on ways to improve. I hope many of you will be able to attend on Monday, November 13 here in Chapel Hill.

You'll recall that the strategic plan called on us to convene a multi-agency working task force with improving the pathway from K-12 to postsecondary education. The soon-to-be-unveiled P-16 Commission entitled "My Future NC," will bring together the top thought leaders from the education, business, philanthropic, faith-based, and nonprofit sectors to develop a multi-year plan that recommends a robust set of goals for the state and enhances the cohesion and connectedness of our education system. I would like to thank the John M. Belk Endowment and MC Belk Pilon and Ann Goodnight and the Goodnight Education Foundation for their generous support. We plan to launch in mid-October and look forward to sharing more details with you prior to the announcement.

Here at the System office, we have a new cohort of Presidential Scholars, high-achieving recent graduates who have chosen to devote the next academic year to serving the University.

- Carson Rich is joining us from Appalachian State, having completed his degree in political science. He's a fan of watching C-SPAN, so being at a BOG meeting is practically like starring in his own action movie.
- Katie Stanley is a poli-sci grad from East Carolina University, and she has already held internships with Senator Thom Tillis and State Representative Dean Arp. She'll be keeping track of all that legislative homework I mentioned.
- Elizabeth Boney graduated from Western Carolina University with a degree in political science. She wants to work in international business, so I'll make sure she spends some time with Tim Minor and our development folks before her year is up.
- And finally, Farris Smith from UNC-Wilmington is a history major. She wants to attend law school, but I'm sure Tom Shanahan can cure her of that before this semester is out.

I look forward to working with these bright young leaders, and hope you will get a chance to know them better as the year progresses.

As we welcome new folks, we would like to say a fond farewell to Pernell Bartlett, Chair of the Staff Assembly. Thank you for your work in representing our staff.

Finally, I want to thank all of the Board members who are participating in the campus visits throughout the fall. There's really no substitute for getting on the road to meet the faculty, staff, and students who are the heart and soul of this University. The work happening every day on our campuses crosses so many fields and touches so many lives in every part of this state. Seeing it firsthand is a reminder of why your service matters, and why we have a responsibility to do even more for the people of North Carolina.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my report.